

The Right Ratio for You

It is 4:15 in the afterschool program, and the school age children are having snack, when a flurry of parents come in pick up their kids. As the lead teacher oversees snack clean up and prepares for outdoor play, the floating teacher takes a count, and seeing there are twelve children remaining, abruptly ends the homework assistance she was providing and heads for the door. The lead teacher is now overseeing snack clean up, homework, free play and outdoor prep. Sound familiar?

In School Age care the staff to child ratio is 1:12 for children up to grade 4 and 1:15 for children grade 4 and up. While this meets state minimum requirements, is it always conducive to a safe and high quality after school program?

Having more than one staff in a school age program provides an added level of safety to your program. More staff means more people that can See, Hear, Assess and Direct the activities of the group. In case of an emergency (such as a child injury), staff can work together to manage the situation (one staff can apply first aid, while the other keeps children at a safe distance and gets help.)

Having more staff available also enhances the quality of your program. Having staff divide the work around routines, such as bathroom breaks and hand washing, lessens transition wait times and interruptions that can lead to behavior issues. Instead of children waiting for others to finish snack and homework, or having to all go inside because one or two children need a bathroom break, staff can facilitate an art activity or outdoor game, while the other supervises snack, bathroom, or homework. Staff will also be able to focus on the children individually if they are not required to manage all of the activities of the group. Children will have more time to engage in activities that interest them, and staff can spend more time engaging with children, which can decrease disruptive behaviors.

When looking at program quality, it is important to look beyond required ratios and consider the *experience* children are having while in your care. While not always possible to do so, planning to staff your after school program to exceed state required minimums can really support the goals of a safe and high quality after school care.